

Message Text

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SUBJECT: MALTA NATIONAL DAY

REF: (A) STATE 228678; (B) VALLETTA 1112

1. IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALTA IN 1974, MALTA'S OFFICIAL NATIONAL DAY HAS BEEN CHANGED TO DECEMBER 13, WHICH IS NOW DESIGNATED AS "REPUBLIC DAY." PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGES OF CONGRATULATIONS SHOULD HENCEFORTH BE SENT ON DECEMBER 13 AND SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO SIR ANTHONY J. MAMO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC.

2. FROM 1964 TO 1971, WHILE THE MALTESE NATIONALIST PARTY WAS IN OFFICE, THE ANNIVERSARY OF MALTESE INDEPENDENCE FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM (SEPTEMBER 21) WAS OFFICIALLY CELEBRATED AS MALTA'S NATIONAL DAY. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF STRONG POLITICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NATIONALIST PARTY AND THE LABOR PARTY OVER THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF MALTA'S "INDEPENDENCE," THE LABORITES ALWAYS OBJECTED TO SUCH RECOGNITION OF SEPTEMBER 21.

3. THEREFORE, WHEN THE LABOR PARTY CAME TO POWER IN 1971, THE NEW LABOR GOVERNMENT WITHDREW THE DESIGNATION OF SEPTEMBER 21, AND SUBSTITUTED SEPTEMBER 8 AS NATIONAL DAY. THIS DATE HAD LONG BEEN CELEBRATED AS A HOLIDAY IN MALTA TO COMMEMORATE THE END OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TWO FAMOUS SIEGES IN MALTESE HISTORY: THE GREAT SEIGE

BY THE TURKS IN 1565, AND THE SECOND BY THE AXIS POWERS DURING WORLD WAR II. NOW, WITH THE CHANGE TO DECEMBER 13 AS NATIONAL DAY, SEPTEMBER 8 HAS REVERTED TO ITS FORMER STATUS AS AN ANNUAL HOLIDAY.

4. HOWEVER, AS A REFLECTION OF THE DIVISIVE NATURE OF MALTESE POLITICS, THE OPPOSITION NATIONALIST PARTY HAS CONTINUED SINCE 1971 TO HOLD ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETINGS AND DEMONSTRATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 21. BUT, AS REPORTED IN REFTEL B, THESE CELEBRATIONS HAVE HAD NO OFFICIAL STATUS WHATSOEVER, AND THEY HAVE BEEN SHARPLY OPPOSED BY THE LABOR GOVERNMENT.

5. COMMENT: IN THIS SMALL ISLAND CITY STATE, WHERE MANY POLITICAL ISSUES LOOM LARGER THAN THEY MIGHT ELSEWHERE, THE WHOLE QUESTION OF WHICH DATE IS MOST APPROPRIATE FOR MALTA'S NATIONAL DAY HAS BECOME AN INCREASINGLY BITTER ONE. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE NATIONALIST PARTY HAS EVEN STATED THAT, WHEN IT IS RETURNED TO POWER, SEPTEMBER 21 WILL BE REINSTATED AS THE OFFICIAL NATIONAL DAY IN PLACE OF DECEMBER 13. UNTIL THAT HAPPENS, THE DATE AND ADDRESSEE FOR OUR CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES SHOULD BE AS STATED IN PARAGRAPH ONE ABOVE. SMITH

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